Effects of task-based activities on young learners' conversational strategies

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Dedicated to my husband for his inexhaustible patience and support.

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EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED ACTIVITIES ON YOUNG LEARNERS' CONVERSATIONAL STRATEGIES

ANA DÉBORA BOTICA DE OLIVEIRA

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS: oral interaction, pair work, task-based teaching, young learners

The present study focuses on oral peer interaction in primary English classrooms, aiming to explore which conversational strategies are employed by its participants to complete a series of three tasks while working in pairs, and how these strategies affect their ability to communicate. The conversational strategies investigated were divided into three categories, use of L1 for task-management purposes, negotiation of meaning strategies (clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, self and other-repetition and prompts) and error correction strategies (self and other-correction). The participants were audio-recorded while completing the tasks, over a period of nine weeks. These recordings were subsequently transcribed, and the strategies identified coded according to the above-mentioned classification. This was followed by quantitative analysis, using grids to register the strategies produced by each pair in each task, to check for patterns of either consistency or variation regarding the frequency of the strategies used during the tasks. Finally, these findings were used to select relevant excerpts of the students' spoken production and to examine them from a qualitative perspective to determine if and how the strategies used helped foster successful communication. Action research was the methodology adopted. Data collection tools consisted of the recordings made during the tasks, the teacher's notes concerning events that took place during the setup, completion and feedback stages of the tasks, and data from the students' self-assessment charts. The teacher's notes included her perceptions and possible interpretation of these events**,** to complement the data from the recordings and to triangulate information. The students' self-assessment charts registered the children's own views on their progress regarding their interactional skills, as well as on their motivation and level of engagement with the task.

Results showed that conversational strategies seem to play an important role in peer interaction, as they were used in nearly half of the children's production. Firstly, despite significant variation between tasks and pairs, L1 for task management purposes was the most frequently used strategy, with students resorting to L1 to address procedural-related issues and to codeswitch when their knowledge of English was insufficient to convey the message. However, there seemed to be a broad tendency for using less L1 over time. Secondly, frequency of negotiation of meaning strategies was relatively low, with weaker students mostly resorting to strategies to ask for assistance, and stronger students mostly producing strategies to provide it, which pointed to the relevance of pair composition regarding the students' level of proficiency. Thirdly, a very low number of error-correction strategies were identified. However, the fact that children showed some improvement regarding their oral interaction skills suggests they do benefit from this type of activity, not by producing modified output, which was very rarely found, but by paying

attention to form, working with formulaic language and developing additional social and cognitive skills as well as their motivation and confidence as speakers of English.

EFEITOS DO ENSINO BASEADO EM TAREFAS NAS ESTRATÉGIAS CONVERSACIONAIS DAS CRIANÇAS

ANA DÉBORA BOTICA DE OLIVEIRA

RESUMO

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: interação oral, trabalho de pares, ensino baseado em tarefas, crianças

Este estudo debruça-se sobre a interação oral entre pares nas aulas de Inglês no ensino primário, tendo como objetivo explorar as estratégias conversacionais empregues pelos participantes para completar três tarefas trabalhando em pares, e a forma como estas afetam a sua capacidade de comunicar. As estratégias investigadas foram o uso da L1 para gestão das tarefas, estratégias de negociação de significado (pedidos de clarificação, pedidos de confirmação, verificações de compreensão, auto e hétero-repetição, e incentivação) e estratégias de correção de erros (auto e hétero-correção). Os participantes foram gravados enquanto realizavam as tarefas, durante nove semanas. As gravações foram posteriormente transcritas, sendo as estratégias codificadas segundo a classificação supramencionada. Seguiu-se uma análise quantitativa, recorrendo a tabelas para registar as estratégias produzidas por cada par e tarefa, procurando-se padrões de consistência ou variação quanto à sua frequência durante cada tarefa. Finalmente, estes dados foram utilizados para a seleção de excertos relevantes da produção oral dos alunos e para a sua análise qualitativa, para determinar se e como as estratégias utilizadas facilitaram a comunicação. A metodologia utilizada foi a investigação de ação. As ferramentas de recolha de dados foram as gravações efetuadas durante a realização das tarefas, as notas da professora sobre ocorrências durante as fases de preparação, realização e *feedback* das tarefas, e dados das grelhas de autoavaliação dos alunos. As notas da professora incluem as suas perceções e possíveis interpretações desses eventos, complementando os dados recolhidos através das gravações e permitindo a triangulação da informação. Os dados da autoavaliação dos alunos registaram as suas perceções quanto à evolução das suas competências de interação e aos seus níveis de motivação e de envolvimento nas tarefas.

Os resultados mostraram que as estratégias conversacionais parecem desempenhar um papel importante na interação entre pares, pois foram usadas em cerca de metade da produção oral dos alunos. Primeiramente, apesar da significativa variação entre pares e tarefas, o uso da L1 para gestão das tarefas foi a estratégia mais utilizada, com os alunos recorrendo à mesma para resolver questões relacionadas com procedimentos, e ao *codeswitch* quando o seu conhecimento de Inglês foi insuficiente para a transmissão da mensagem. Parece, no entanto, haver uma tendência para a diminuição do uso da L1 ao

longo do tempo. Em segundo lugar, a frequência das estratégias de negociação de significado foi relativamente baixa, com os alunos menos competentes a recorrerem maioritariamente a estratégias para pedir ajuda, e os mais competentes a produzir estratégias para proporcioná-la, o que enfatiza a importância da composição dos pares relativamente ao nível de proficiência dos alunos. Finalmente, foram muito poucas as estratégias de correção de erros identificadas. No entanto, o facto de os alunos evidenciarem melhorias quanto às suas competências de interação oral sugere que os mesmos beneficiam destas atividades, não através da modificação da sua produção oral, que muito raramente foi identificada, mas pela atenção prestada à forma, pelo trabalho com a linguagem formulaica e pelo desenvolvimento de outras competências cognitivas e sociais, e da sua motivação e confiança enquanto falantes de Inglês.

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Introduction

The aim of this project is to analyse the type and frequency of conversational strategies used by its participants while engaged in spoken peer interaction, and how these strategies enable learners to communicate effectively. Philp, Adams & Iwashita (2013) defined peer interaction as "any communicative activity carried out *between learners*, where there is minimal or no participation from the teacher" (p.3). As there is presently a broad consensus among researchers regarding its relevant role in language acquisition, peer interaction should, in my view, be regularly integrated into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons. However, it has been my experience that primary English teachers in Portugal tend to avoid this type of activity. This may be for a variety of reasons, from the belief that children do not have the necessary linguistic or social skills to a lack of understanding of the potential of peer interaction to foster language acquisition. In fact, these views have been consistently challenged by several studies, while the manifold benefits of peer interaction have gained strength among EFL teachers and researchers.

Moreover, although identifying the development of oral skills as the main goal for grades 3 and 4, the Portuguese government's guidelines for primary English teaching, *Metas Curriculares de Inglês – 1º Ciclo* (Cravo, Bravo & Duarte, 2015), are rather vague in their definition of spoken interaction, referring only to its elementary nature and progression from single words and formulaic language towards less rudimentary structures. By failing to mention the interaction patterns to be explored, the document might be leading teachers to focus exclusively on teacher-student interaction, which, while beneficial, necessarily limits relevant learning opportunities in our classrooms, both because it might lead to excessively teacher-centred lessons, and because time and class size do not allow for frequent teacher-student interaction. Additionally, studies (Philp, Oliver & Mackey, 2008) indicate that children draw different benefits from varied patterns of interaction, mostly scaffolding and recasting opportunities when interacting with adults, while peer interaction appears to maximise practice and emphasize the link between linguistic and social competences as the strategies used during interaction help develop social skills, which will in turn result in further linguistic benefits. In light of this, it becomes difficult to argue against the regular use of peer spoken interaction activities in EFL classrooms as an effective tool to promote language acquisition.

The choice of a task-based approach was based on research indicating that tasks are particularly effective in promoting meaningful interaction between learners, as they

foster students' engagement and effective collaboration, their shared status as learners favours equal participation, and the task's context facilitates unambiguous understanding of the partners' utterances (Oliver, Philp & Duchesne, 2017). Nevertheless, it has been my experience that some preliminary issues need to be addressed by teachers when designing or selecting tasks to be used with young learners, both linguistic (children must have the necessary language to complete the task), and task-related (the level of difficulty of the task, its cognitive and social demands, its adequacy to the learners' maturational stage, and children's level of familiarity with it).

It therefore seems recommendable that EFL teachers develop a deeper understanding of the processes which take place during peer interaction, and a stronger awareness of the benefits arising from it to better inform their practice. With this in mind, the research questions underlying this study are the following:

1 - What is the type and frequency of conversational strategies used by 9-10-year-old 4th grade EFL students while performing task-based activities in pairs?

2 - How do these strategies influence the children's ability to communicate?

Chapter I: Literature Review

I.1. The Interaction Hypothesis

Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1981) introduced a theoretical account of second language acquisition (SLA) based on the role played by comprehensible input, information received by the learner, and output, the learner's linguistic production, to support interaction. Long argued that interaction facilitates language acquisition by providing learners with immediate feedback which will, in turn, prompt them to modify their utterances to produce comprehensible output. In other words, when experiencing communication breakdowns, learners resort to strategies such as repeating the message *verbatim* or making syntactical or lexical adjustments (among others) to their utterances. These were designated negotiation of meaning (NoM) strategies and were operationalized by Long as clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks. Clarification requests happen when a speaker does not fully understand his interlocutor's previous utterance and signals this by eliciting clarification, usually through a wh-, a yes/no or an inverted intonation question (Long, 1981). Confirmation checks take place when a speaker tries to ascertain that he fully understood his interlocutor's previous utterance. They always consist of rising intonation questions, with or without a tag, and

entail repetition of all or part of the interlocutor's previous utterance (Long, 1981). Lastly, comprehension checks occur when the speaker tries to ascertain that his utterance has been fully understood by his interlocutor. It usually consists of a tag question, the repetition of all or part of the previous utterance, or of explicit questions such as *Do you understand?* (Long, 1981). However, comprehension checks are unlikely to occur with children due to their egocentric nature (Oliver, 1998). It is important to mention, though, that Long's work focused on the interaction between native and non-native adult speakers (NS and NNS) in immersion contexts, thus his conclusions can hardly be generalized to children learning EFL in formal instruction settings.

Other researchers have contributed to the Interaction Hypothesis. Pica (1987) analysed the social aspects of interaction, claiming that equality of status between participants promotes interactional modifications. Furthermore, Ellis (1991) suggested that SLA involves three basic procedures: noticing, the learner's conscious attention to features in the input, comparison, when differences are identified between features in the input and the learner's output, and integration, the construction and long-term memory storage of hypotheses based on those differences. Ellis further claims that the role of modified output in language acquisition is primarily that of promoting noticing and comparison. It follows that interactional feedback facilitates SLA not only by prompting learners to actively work to overcome communication breakdowns but also, according to García-Mayo & Ibarrola (2015), by promoting "the engagement of the learners' cognitive mechanisms (attention) in processing form-meaning relationships" (p.41).

I.2. Criticism of the Interaction Hypothesis

Several researchers have conducted studies to test the claims made by the Interaction Hypothesis. Foster (1998) examined 21 adult, intermediate EFL learners in a natural classroom environment, while working in different settings (dyads and groups) and with different task types (required and optional information exchange tasks) to determine whether setting or task type influenced the participants language production, their use of NoM strategies, and the amount of modified output produced. Foster concluded that, overall, both dyads and required information exchange tasks favoured language production, NoM use and modified output. However, the generalizability of these findings is compromised by the significant individual differences detected. Additionally, her findings regarding the frequency of NoM were much lower than those reported in Pica's (1989) study conducted with native and non-native speakers in

experimental settings. By suggesting a more rigorous definition of NoM strategies, Foster focused only on instances where communication difficulties were clearly signalled, and found these to be significantly less frequent, confined to a few individuals, with modified output limited to short utterances. Furthermore, Foster suggests other possible explanations for these differences. Firstly, she argues that while in experimental settings students are more focused on the task and its completion, the informality of classrooms decreases the pressures on task completion and students' performance. Secondly, she claims learners in a classroom context tend to avoid NoM, both because it may render the task excessively slow and tedious, and because they fear that displaying a frequent lack of understanding will make them look incompetent in the eyes of their peers. Thirdly, Foster suggests that to avoid these downsides, learners may adopt what she calls the "pretend and hope" strategy, that is feigning understanding and hoping that future utterances will clarify the matter (p.19). In conclusion, the author's main concerns stemmed from a lack of precision regarding the identification of the NoM strategies, and from the fact that research was often overly theoretical, disconnected from classroom practice, thus disregarding the possible influence of setting in learners' performance.

Foster & Ohta (2005) extended the concept and scope of interactional strategies. They examined 20 adult, intermediate EFL learners doing an information exchange task in pairs, not only quantifying the use of NoM strategies resulting from communication breakdowns and the number of interactional modifications produced, but also looking at peer assistance episodes which foster language acquisition in the absence of communication difficulties. The authors identified four main problems with NoM strategies, firstly arguing learners tend to avoid them in classroom settings since they often lead to tedious and face-threatening episodes. Secondly, they claim that categorizing NoM strategies is far from a straightforward process since their form, often ambiguous, does not necessarily reflect their pragmatic discourse function. An interlocutor's repetition of his partner's previous utterance, for instance, may serve as a confirmation check, to express interest or to provide the interlocutor with further time to complete an utterance. Thirdly, they note that NoM typically focuses on lexical rather than morphosyntactic issues and, as the latter are unlikely to lead to communication breakdowns, learners tend to ignore them and move forward with their conversation. Finally, they emphasize the need for a qualitative analysis of the learners' interaction, since quantification of NoM strategies does not necessarily reflect the potential of a task to promote learning. Their findings suggest that NoM is only one of several ways to

promote language acquisition, as they found students supported each other in several other ways such as expressing interest, making suggestions, or giving their partners time to organize language production. Students tended not to interrupt the flow of conversation but instead resorted to other strategies which allowed them to monitor and modify their own and their partners' utterances in ways that minimized overt communication breakdowns. Additionally, task type did not seem to have a fundamental influence on language acquisition as, while NoM and modified output were infrequent in certain task types, an appropriate topic, along with the desire to express oneself and understand one another, still resulted in students working cooperatively, thus promoting significant learning opportunities.

I.3. Young learners' specificities regarding peer interaction

Several studies have focused on the use of conversational strategies by children, particularly regarding their frequency and type, as well as the context in which they occur. Oliver (1998) conducted a study of 96 ESL students between 8 and 13 years of age in gender and age-matched pairs while completing two communicative tasks, concluding that while they were able to use and benefit from the NoM strategies defined by Long (clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks), there were differences in relation to adult learners regarding the proportional use of individual strategies. The most significant of these regarded the near absence of comprehension checks in children's interaction, which the author justified with the claim that "possibly because of their level of development and their purported egocentric nature, primary school children tend to focus on constructing their own meaning, and less on facilitating their partners' construction of meaning" (p.379).

I.3.1. The influence of language proficiency and setting in child peer interaction

Looking into the conversational interactions between children aged 8 to 13, Oliver (2002) studied the interaction between NS/NS, NNS/NS and NNS/NNS dyads while completing two communicative tasks. Conclusions pointed to non-native and low proficiency children using more NoM strategies. In fact, although a minimum level of proficiency is necessary for learners to negotiate for meaning, once this threshold has been achieved NoM is more frequent among less proficient students and less frequent among more proficient ones (whose need to rely on it to construct meaning is reduced).

However, although ground-breaking when it comes to child peer interaction, Oliver's studies focused on ESL settings, while research regarding children in EFL contexts remains scarce to date. Moreover, significant differences between EFL and ESL settings regarding exposure and access to the target language advise against the generalization of Oliver's findings to the former.

Some studies focusing on child peer interaction in EFL settings have been conducted. Ibarrola & Martinez (2015) studied eight pairs of 7-8-year-old EFL children with very low levels of proficiency while playing a guessing game in a classroom setting to determine the frequency and type of NoM strategies used, as well as to ascertain if the results obtained were similar to those of ESL adult and child learners. In accordance with previous studies, they found that a) EFL child learners did use NoM strategies, although significantly less than children and adults in ESL contexts, which might be explained by their lower level of proficiency, and b) they used the same type of strategies as adults apart from comprehension checks, which, as Oliver, they attributed to the participants lower developmental stage.

Finally, García-Mayo & Ibarrola (2015) analysed 20 pairs of mainstream EFL 3rd and 5th graders and 20 pairs of children at the same levels learning EFL in a CLIL context while completing a picture placement task to determine the effects of setting and age in children's use of NoM strategies. They concluded that, although all students used NoM strategies, CLIL learners used nearly twice as many as mainstream EFL learners, while resorting to L1 much less frequently. On the other hand, 5th graders in both groups used less NoM and, surprisingly, more L1 than 3rd graders. These findings suggest that increased exposure to English provides learners with stronger interactional skills to negotiate for meaning. However, while older age and a higher level of proficiency reduce the need for NoM, age simultaneously leads to more L1, with the authors suggesting this may be due to a decrease in the older students' motivation regarding the tasks.

I.3.2. The influence of age on peer interaction

Pinter (2006) compared 20 children between the ages of 10 and 11, and 10 adult, beginner EFL learners while completing a spot-the-differences task, concluding that children found fewer differences than adults as they were less effective in handling the demands of the task. While adults focused on problem-solving and task completion, children adopted a looser approach and tended to simply name the items in their pictures. Although believing these differences are partly explained by children's lower cognitive

development, Pinter (2006) further suggests they may be the consequence of familiar classroom practices, particularly "the dominant classroom discourse of naming things that the children are so used to" (p.626). Additionally, while focusing on the effects of task repetition, Pinter (2007) studied one pair of 10-year-old EFL learners completing three spot-the-differences tasks over a period of three weeks and found improvement in children's fluency and their ability to handle task demands. She also found instances of peer support, with the more competent student assisting the weaker one in different ways, and children displaying progress in their ability to pay attention and respond to each other more carefully. As encouraging as these findings may be, though, both the small sample size and the experimental setting advise against their generalizability to other contexts.

Finally, Oliver, Philp & Duchesne (2017) analyzed 22 children between the ages of five and seven, and 20 older (11-12-year-old) English as an Additional Language students working in pairs to complete two-way information gap tasks. The goal was to quantify instances of a) cooperation, reciprocity and conflict resolution, b) task management skills, c) cognitive involvement, and d) focus on form, and to determine how these features differ according to age. They found that children generally worked in a cooperative and reciprocal fashion to support each other's language production and that, despite a few instances of unresolved conflict requiring the teacher's intervention, learners mostly tried to resolve it themselves although sometimes they did so by simply moving forward with the task. Additionally, students displayed adequate task management skills, were nearly always on task, both linguistically and cognitively engaged, and evidenced the ability to focus on language by negotiating meaning, providing feedback or by engaging in language play episodes. Moreover, older students evidenced a slightly higher ability regarding cooperation and reciprocity, although they at times found the tasks insufficiently interesting and challenging, whilst younger ones showed a higher tendency for conflict while their ability to overcome it was similar to that of their older peers.

In summary, research to date indicates that children do use conversational strategies, although with differences in relation to adults concerning the proportional use of individual strategies. These differences seem to stem from several circumstances, from the children's age and level of cognitive development to their language proficiency and learning context. They do not however, prevent young learners from engaging in and benefiting from peer interaction.

Chapter II: The Action Research

II.1. Context

This study was conducted in a fourth-grade class composed of 25 pupils, 12 boys and 13 girls, aged between nine and ten years old. All pupils had Portuguese as their first language (L1) and were learning English as a foreign language. Although no children were diagnosed as special educational needs students, four students (two boys and two girls) were identified as needing additional support. Most children had been learning English since pre-school and, from 1st to 4th grade they had two one-hour lessons per week. The course book adopted by the school for the 4th grade was *Backpack Gold 3* (Herrera & Pinkley, 2010), following *Backpack Gold 2* (Herrera & Pinkley, 2010) in 3rd grade. This is a challenging book, densely packed in terms of content and with a heavy focus on grammar, whose activities frequently require adaptation to provide for a more communicative, meaning-focused teaching approach.

The school, Externato de São José, is a renowned private institution located in the outskirts of Lisbon, its teaching ranging from pre-school to 12th grade. It is run by a religious order in accordance with its spiritual beliefs, upholding values such as solidarity, tolerance and inclusion, as well as discipline and hard work.

II.2. Action research

Action Research (AR) was the methodology used in this study. Burns (2010) defines AR as a small-scale, contextualized methodology with teachers acting as researchers, as they identify problematic or otherwise relevant topics to explore within their classroom environment, and are afterwards expected to act on their findings, thus improving their practice. The stages followed in the course of this study are detailed iin Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Stages of Action Research

Stages	Description
1 – Selecting the topic and determining the research questions	**Topic: spoken peer interaction** **Research questions:** 1- What are the type and frequency of conversational strategies used by 9-10-year-old 4th grade EFL students while performing task-based activities in pairs? 2- How do these strategies influence the children's ability to communicate?
2 – Planning (scheduling, developing data gathering tools and methodology)	**Scheduling:** implementing 3 tasks throughout a period of two and a half months, from mid-September to mid-December **Data gathering tools:** recordings of the children completing the spot-the-differences tasks, teacher's notes and students' self-assessment charts **Methodology:** recording and transcription of student production, with subsequent codification of conversational strategies, followed by quantitative and qualitative data analysis and triangulation of findings from different data gathering tools
3 – Data collection	Implementing data collection tools
4 – Reflection	Analysis and interpretation of collected data, reflection on the finding's implications for classroom practice and suggestions for further research

II.3. Procedure

Prior to the beginning of the study, letters of consent were sent to the school board, parents and students (Appendices A, B and C), stating its purpose, the procedures to be followed and the conditions regarding participation. Given the age of the participants, the letter to the students was written in a child-friendly manner. All stakeholders were assured the students' identities would be protected and that no consequences would arise from either choosing not to participate or from withdrawing at any time.

As to the criteria used to set up pairs, these were a) pairing boys with girls (to better differentiate their voices while listening to the recordings, b) coupling children who were friendly and respectful to one another to favour cooperative peer interaction and c)

coupling children with different levels of proficiency as Pinter (2007) suggests this might lead to more frequent interaction. Therefore, all four pairs recorded included one weaker and one stronger student. Language knowledge was determined by their 3rd grade assessment (apart from two students, James and Sherlock Holmes, who were new to the school and signalled by the cooperating teacher as weaker students as they had only started learning EFL in 3rd grade) and learners were included in one of four categories: below average (Sherlock Holmes and James), average (Margaret and Charlotte), above average (Emma, Maddie and Thomas) and significantly above average (Frederick). However, Sherlock Holmes made significant progress throughout the term and by the final task was in fact an above average student. Pairs were composed of the same students throughout the three tasks. Pair A included Emma and Sherlock Holmes, pair B included Maddie and James, pair C included Frederick and Margaret, and pair D included Thomas and Charlotte.

Data was collected through the completion of the tasks over a period of nine weeks, with approximately three-week intervals between them. Students were recorded for the length of the task (10 minutes) and all the recorded dyads were able to spot the six differences.

II.4. The tools

The data gathering tools used in this study were the recordings made during the three tasks, the teacher's notes to provide information complementing the recordings, and the students' self-assessment charts to provide the children's views on their own progress.

II.4.1. The tasks

When using tasks with young learners, it is essential that teachers adapt them to their needs and skills. Cameron (2001) argued that appropriate tasks for children should provide for unity and coherence between topic, activity and outcome, be meaningful and engaging, have a clear purpose and language learning goals, and a distinct beginning and end. Therefore, the tasks used in this study (Appendices D, E and F) were designed to fit these features. They were spot-the-differences tasks where children were given two picture cards with six differences between them and subsequently worked in pairs, asking and answering questions to identify them. Each task was complemented with writing cards that early finishers could use to register the differences (Appendices G, H and I).

The topic of each task followed the three course book units taught during my practicum (Unit 1 covered time and daily routines, Unit 2 focused on jobs and Unit 3 on chores and activities). The requisite grammatical structures for each task were likewise chosen from the respective course book unit. All tasks were carried out towards the end of the respective unit to ensure that these low proficiency students were given the necessary linguistic resources to complete them. The choice of a communicative task was based on research indicating that these are particularly effective in promoting meaningful interaction between young learners, as they encourage their engagement, equal participation (particularly in a dyad setting) and require effective collaboration and unambiguous understanding of the interlocutors' utterances (Oliver, Philp & Duchesne, 2017). All tasks were designed by the author of this study bearing in mind the need to adjust their cognitive demands to the learners' cognitive and social abilities, and to ensure they provided the students with a meaningful and engaging context for language practice.

Task completion was preceded by a brief revision of the target language and demonstration by the teacher and a stronger student using similar cards to model and activate the language required. Setting up entailed dividing the students into As and Bs. B students were called to the front of the class to receive B cards, the back of which displayed their partners' name to minimize time loss and classroom disruption, while the cooperating teacher handed out cards to A students who remained seated. B students were then asked to sit next to their designated partners and wait for the teacher's signal to start the activity. Students were told they would have ten minutes to complete the task and a stop signal was set. Subsequently, instruction checking questions such as *How many differences are there? Which questions do you ask?* and *What do you do when you find a difference?* were asked to ensure understanding of the tasks' procedures while the teacher placed and activated the recording devices. Finally, the teacher gave the signal to start the activity.

II.4.2. The teacher's notes

These were reflective notes taken immediately after the lessons in which the tasks were completed, to complement the data from the recordings and to triangulate information. Although an attempt was made to observe the whole class, there was a closer focus on the study's participants, particularly during the task completion stage. The notes concerned events that took place during the task set up, completion and feedback stages, and included the teacher's perceptions and possible interpretation of these events.

Initially, observation categories included the time taken to complete the activity, the children's disposition and attitudes towards them and the use of paralinguistic features such as gestures and facial expressions. Subsequently, the need arose to add information regarding the children's comments during the feedback stage, namely their continuous mention and appreciation of the collaborative nature of the task, and their progress regarding spoken fluency, as over time the students' speech evidenced less pauses and hesitations and their pronunciation improved. The comments were listed and examined to determine whether they were supported by other data gathering tools and by previous studies, thus providing possible explanations for some of the study's findings.

II.4 3. The students' self-assessment charts

Although used mainly to foster students' reflection on their learning and progress and not included in the originally defined data gathering tools, over time self-assessment data became relevant to this study as it provided the children's own views on their progress regarding their interactional skills, as well as on their motivation and level of engagement with the task. Children were asked to fill in three self-assessment charts (Appendices J, K and L), one at the end of each unit. These included questions about listening, speaking, reading, writing and peer interaction. After noticing that the first question of each chart could be directly related to the tasks in this study, it became even more relevant to use this information as data gathering tools. However, for the purposes of this study only information regarding question 1 (*Ask and tell about…*) and *3 things I enjoyed* were analysed. Analysis of question 1 entailed determining the children's perception of their progress, as they moved from *I need help* to *Good* or *Great!* Analysis of *3 things I enjoyed* entailed determining whether children displayed higher levels of motivation over time.

II.5. The conversational strategies

The conversational strategies investigated in this study include NoM and error - correction strategies, as well the use of L1 and L2 for task management purposes.

a) **NoM strategies** involved comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification requests**,** as mentioned in the Introduction. They also included:

Self-repetition – partial or complete repetition of one's own utterance, either to respond to a clarification request or confirmation check or to ensure the interlocutor's understanding.

Other-repetition – partial or complete repetition of the interlocutor's utterance, usually for the speaker to gain time to organize and produce language.

Examples of self-repetition were coded as NoM strategies only when the context allowed the listener to determine they were used to overcome problems with meaning (they were produced after pauses and followed by some signal from the interlocutor that meaning had been understood, as in excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1:

Sherlock Holmes: What does Eve have to do?

Emma: Make the bed. (3.0) Make the bed.

Sherlock Holmes: Ah, OK. What.does.Doug have to do?

However, as stated by Foster & Ohta (2005), NoM strategies can be difficult to code and easily misclassified. For that reason, the classification in this study was based on function rather than form, meaning they were considered only when context allowed the listener to understand the function they served in discourse. For instance, clarification requests were classified as such only when they were clearly used to address communication difficulties. Similarly, confirmation checks were classified as such only when their purpose was unequivocally to confirm the interlocutor's previous utterance.

Prompting – this occurs when a speaker provides his interlocutor with language, either to encourage him or suggest an idea, or to overcome communication obstacles signalled by speech pauses or other noticeable speech difficulties.

b) Error-correction strategies

Other-correction – Provision of the correct target form in a way that the interlocutor is expected to easily perceive it as a corrective utterance (Ibarrola & Martinez, 2015).

Self-correction – A speaker's correction of his or her own utterance without being prompted by an interlocutor (Foster & Ohta, 2005).

c) Use of L1: In a context with relatively low L2 exposure and a shared mother tongue, it is to be expected that young learners will resort to L1 whenever they lack the L2 skills to communicate. It was thus decided to include use of L1 in the strategies to be analysed.

Use of L1 was considered when an utterance contained at least one word in L1, and the results were expressed as a percentage of total turns.

The students' recordings were subsequently transcribed, and the strategies identified were coded. This was followed by quantitative analysis, using grids (Appendix M) to register the strategies produced by each pair in each task, to check for patterns of either consistency or variation regarding the frequency of conversational strategies used, both during individual tasks and over time. Subsequently, these findings were used to select relevant excerpts of the students' spoken production and to examine them from a qualitative perspective, to determine if, how and when the strategies used helped foster successful communication. The results will be presented and discussed in the Results section.

Chapter III: Results

The purpose of this section is to present and analyse the results obtained throughout this study. To answer the research questions regarding the type and frequency of conversational strategies used by 9-10-year-old 4th grade EFL students while performing task-based activities in pairs, and how these influence the children's ability to communicate successfully, four pairs of students were recorded while performing similar tasks over a period of approximately two months. The recordings were then transcribed, and each strategy was coded. Episodes were then analysed, first from a quantitative perspective to determine the number of conversational strategies used by the learners, and subsequently from a qualitative point of view to verify their usefulness to promote successful communication. The following sections examine in further detail the frequency of each group of strategies (use of L1, NoM and error-correction), and how each of these groups fostered the children's ability to communicate.

III.1. Data analyses

III.1.1. Frequency of conversational strategies

The first step was globally analysing the number and type of strategies used (figure 1), namely use of L1, NoM and error-correction strategies. Analysis of the number of strategies used by each pair throughout the tasks shows that pair B used an exceptionally high number of strategies. Variation regarding the remaining pairs was far less significant, although pair D nearly doubled the number of strategies used by pair A.

This increase in pairs B and D is, as we will see in the following subsection, related to a rise in the use of L1.

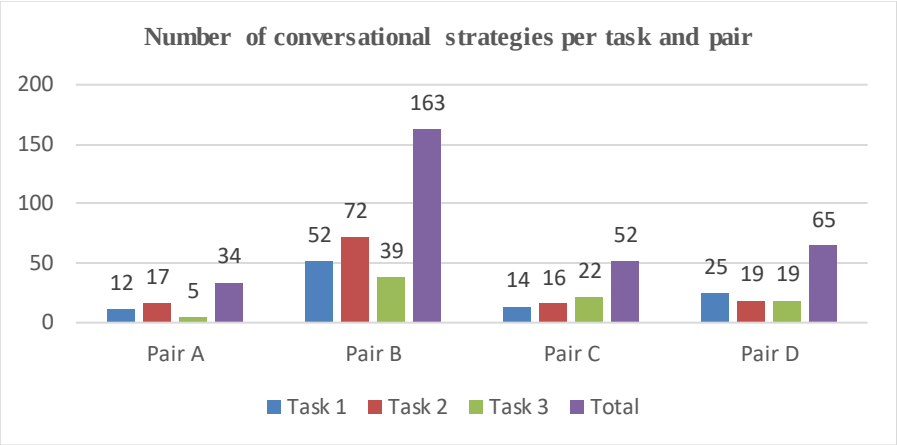

Fig. 1 – Number of conversational strategies per task and pair

However, given the significant variation regarding the number of turns produced both per pair and per task (figure 2), it became relevant to examine the percentage of strategies by total number of turns (figure 3).

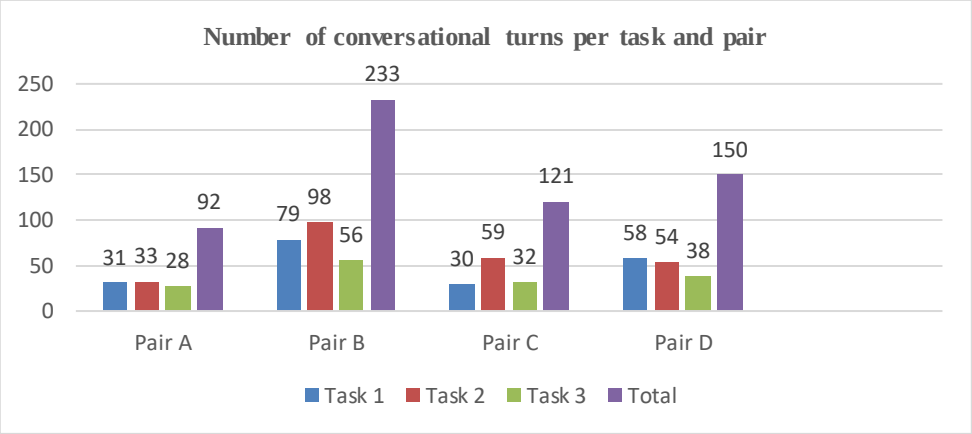

Fig. 2 – Number of conversational turns per task and pair

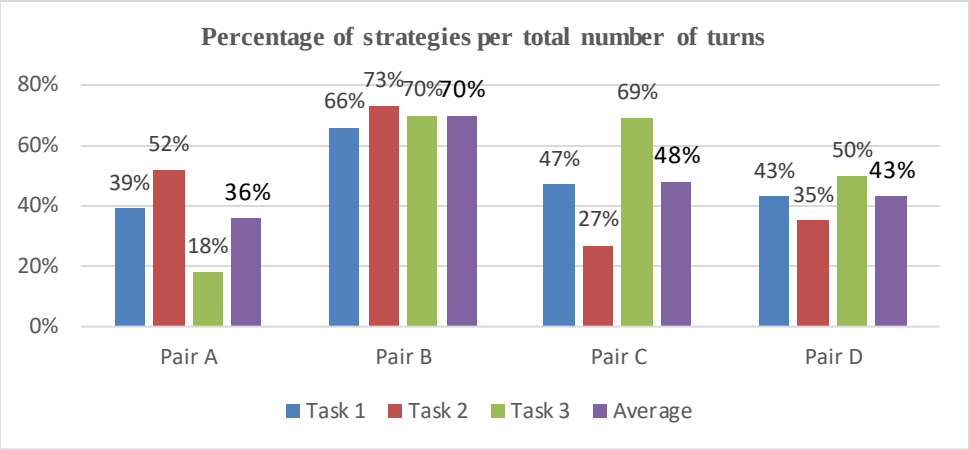

Fig. 3 – Percentage of strategies per total number of turns

As shown in figure 3, there is significant variation between the average percentage of strategies used by each pair, ranging from 36% for pair A to 70% for pair B. The higher percentage of strategies used by pair B is largely determined by the increased use of L1. This may be due to the performance of James, a weaker than average student who was new to the school and had started learning EFL only in the 3rd grade.

Additionally, there seem to be no identifiable patterns regarding the percentage of strategies per turn between tasks, as it varies significantly for pairs A and C, slightly less for pair D, while pair B shows little variation. This absence of patterns also applies to the progress of the different pairs throughout the tasks. Between tasks 1 and 2, pairs A and B increased their use of conversational strategies, while pairs C and D reduced it. Between tasks 2 and 3, pairs A and B reduced the use of conversational strategies, while pairs C and D increased it. Finally, between tasks 1 and 3, pair A evidenced a decrease in the percentage of strategies used, while the remaining pairs showed a rise, although ranging from 4% and 7% for pairs B and D respectively, to 22% for pair C.

As we will see in section III.1.2, though, this apparently erratic distribution is mostly conditioned by changes regarding what is clearly the most frequently used strategy, the use of L1 for task management purposes. However, in the following sub-sections each type of strategy will be analysed individually to determine whether patterns can be found and how their use affects the children's ability to communicate.

III.1.2. Use of L1 for task management purposes

Firstly, it is important to say that, overall, learners did not make off-task use of L1 (three brief examples of off-task talk were found, two in L1 and one in L2). L1 was used

almost exclusively for task-management purposes, either to address procedure-related issues (*É a tua vez. / Rodeia a diferença.)* or by code-switching when knowledge of the target language was insufficient to produce an utterance, as in excerpt 2 below.

Excerpt 2:

Maddie: OK, *'bora* (let's go)! (2.0) *Não* (No)! *O* uncle *é que é* journalist! (It's the uncle who's a journalist)!

James: *Mas eu disse* aunt. (But I said aunt.).

However, given the large variations in the number of turns and use of L1 strategies in each pair's spoken production (table 2), it again became necessary to analyse pairs individually. Figure 4 shows that not all four reduced the use of L1 for task management. In fact, while pairs A and C decreased their mother-tongue use in 21% and 17% respectively between tasks 1 and 3, pair D maintained its L1/CT ratio, and pair B increased it by 12%.

Table 2- Number of L1 for task management strategies in relation to the number of turns

	CT	**L1**	**L1/CT ratio**
Task 1	198	58	29%
Task 2	244	90	37%
Task 3	154	41	27%

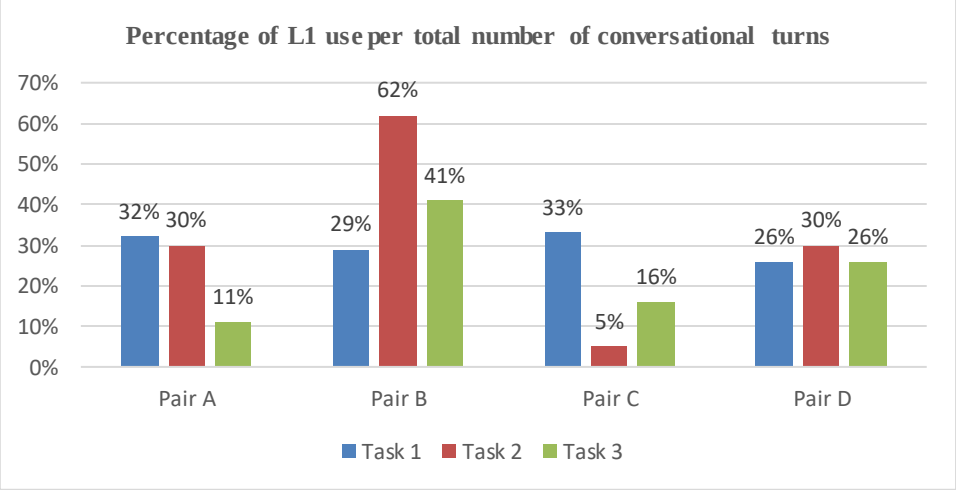

Fig. 4 – Percentage of L1 use per total number of conversational turns

As the use of L2 for task management purposes is infrequent and shows no significant alterations over tasks, in the case of pairs A and C less L1 use may stem from task familiarity and from an improvement in the students' speaking skills. This is also suggested by the teacher's notes, which mention a notable decrease regarding the length of time students needed to complete these tasks (from approximately ten to five minutes) and the frequency of pauses and hesitations in children's speech, by the students' self-assessment charts, which evidence a growing confidence in their ability and motivation to understand and speak to each other, as well as by the overall reduction in the number of turns between tasks 1 and 3. The significantly higher number of turns in task 2 is largely due to pair B, which produced 98 turns with very short utterances and frequent interruptions. Furthermore, while pair C nearly doubled the number of turns between tasks 1 and 2, this did not result from more frequent L1 use. The higher number of turns in task 2 may have been due to the introduction of the genitive in the question (*What does X's mother/father, etc. do?*), which is an unfamiliar structure to these students.

On the other hand, again according to information contained in the teacher's notes, the overall increase regarding pair B appears to be related to the students' more playful disposition (they were responsible for more than half of L1 for task-management strategies, with an average percentage of 44%) and to the performance of the above-mentioned weaker than average student. The low variation and relatively frequent use of L1 over the three tasks evidenced by pair D appears to stem less from low language proficiency and more from a pragmatic and competitive attitude, as these students seemed particularly focused on completing the tasks before the rest of the class. Conversely, pair C used L1 only 18 times throughout the study, with a percentage of 18%. This seems to be due to Frederick, a student with exceptional linguistic skills whose efforts to use L2 for task-management are displayed in excerpt 3. In task 1, students asked the question *What does Garfield do at (time)?* to find differences regarding the actions performed. When Margaret asked a question presuming a difference in the time rather than in the actions, Frederick made a clear effort to avoid L1 to correct his partner. Instead, he used simplified L2 and modelled the appropriate question.

Excerpt 3:

Margaret: Er (1.0) What time.go to bed.Garfield?. What time Garfield.go to bed?

Frederick: Hum (3.0) In my in my paper (1.0) Garfield has a dinner. In my paper Garfield has a dinner. No go to bed. Er (2.0) What Garfield does do at seven.seven thirty?

Moreover, use of L1 is, to some extent, to be expected in a context of low proficiency, relatively low L2 exposure and a shared mother tongue. What the above findings seem to suggest is that, while increased use of L1 for task-management purposes is not always related to lower linguistic skills, the use of L2 for similar purposes appears to be contingent upon these.

III.1.3. Error correction strategies

As shown in figure 5, the frequency of error correction strategies, namely self and other-correction, was overall low, both in relation to the number of turns and to the number of strategies used. They represent approximately 8% of the strategies. Of the 24 error correction strategies identified, 13 (54%) were self-correction strategies and 12 (46%) were examples of students explicitly correcting their peers (no recasting situations were found). Additionally, as shown in figure 5, 12 (almost 50 %) of these were used by one single pair (C), and 11 were produced by Frederick, the particularly proficient student, also referenced in the teacher's notes as one who is exceptionally fond and capable of helping and even praising his partner (as shown in excerpt 4). This again seems to indicate this age group's limited ability to make use of this type of strategy.

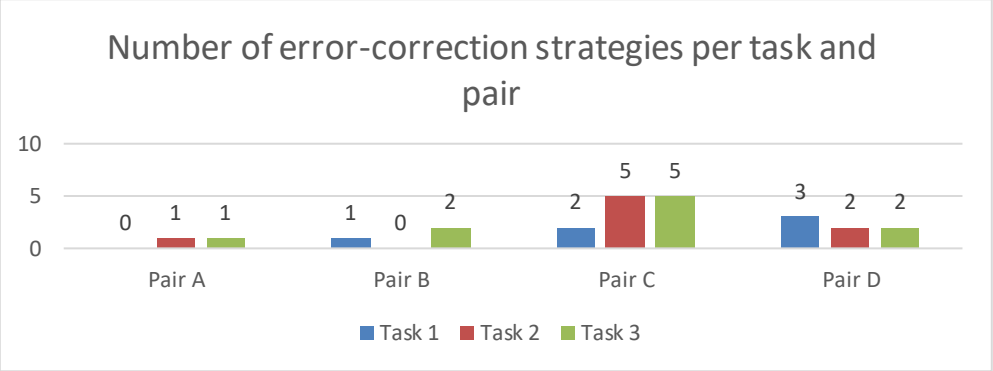

Fig. 5 – Number of error correction strategies per task and pair

Excerpt 4:

Margaret: He have a chower.

Frederick: Have a chower? *Não* (No). Has a shower.

Margaret: Has a chower.

Frederick: *Não é chower*. (It's not chower.)

Margaret: Chower..

Frederick: Is not chower, is shower.

Margaret: Shower.

Frederick: Good!

None of the other students show Frederick's ability or tendency to correct their peers, either because they were not able to identify the errors when they occurred or, as in excerpt 4, because they did not need to address them to communicate effectively. Therefore, the low frequency of error correction strategies seems to stem both from the children's limited skills and from the fact that they do not need these strategies to achieve effective communication, particularly while completing communicative tasks.

III.1.4. Negotiation of meaning strategies

A total of 69 NoM strategies were identified in this study, representing nearly 12% of the turns and 22% of the strategies. Of these, 21 were prompts, 20 were confirmation checks, 12 were situations of other-repetition, nine of self-repetition, and six were clarification requests. Only one comprehension check was found (as expected given this age group's limited ability to focus on the needs of their partner rather than their own).

Given the relatively low number of NoM strategies, analysis was based on absolute values as well as on percentages. Despite significant variation in the pairs' progress between tasks (figure 6), when we analyse the number of NoM strategies per pair, we find that pair B used 35, that is approximately 50% of their frequency, while pairs A, C and D used only seven (10%), 16 (23%) and 11 (16%), respectively. In fact, pair B consistently produced the highest number of turns and the highest percentage of strategies throughout the tasks and was responsible for five out of six clarification requests and13 of 20 confirmation checks, leading us to believe that James' increased need to negotiate meaning stemmed from his lower linguistic skills. Moreover, the fact that James was also responsible for eight out of 12 other-repetitions suggests that he often needed added time to decode his interlocutor's utterances and to produce his own. However, it is important to remember that this pair adopted a particularly playful attitude towards the tasks which, according to the teacher's notes, originated more L1 than would have been necessary to complete the task. The fact that pair C used more NoM strategies than pair B in task 3 is largely due to an increase in the number of prompts (six).

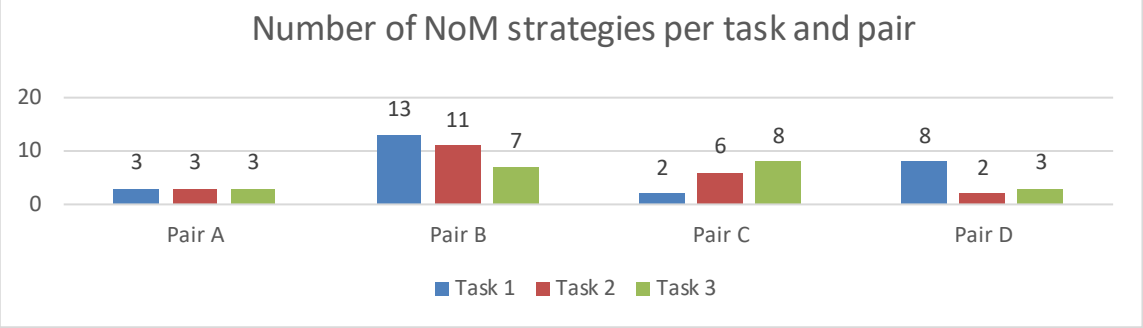

Fig. 6 – Number of NoM strategies per task and pair

Furthermore, analysis of the type of NoM strategies per pair (figure 7) shows that, besides the increased use of clarification requests, confirmation checks and other-repetitions by pair B, significant variation regarding the use of these strategies was limited to prompting episodes by pair C, which was responsible for 10 out of 21 of these episodes.

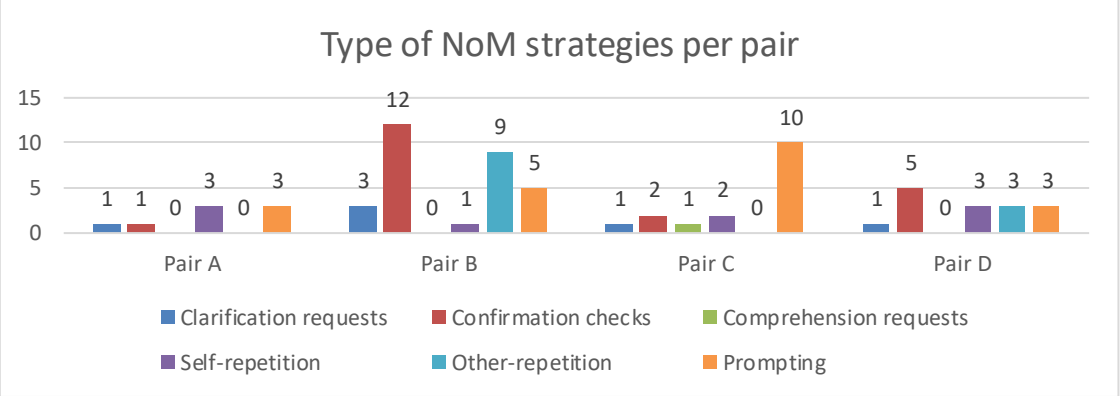

Fig. 7 – Type of NoM strategies per pair

Moreover, all 10 were produced by Frederick, the exceptionally skilled student mentioned in the previous subsection, resulting from communication difficulties signalled by his partner Margaret. In excerpt 5, for example, when Margaret struggles to remember the vocabulary, Frederick tries to provide her with suitable options.

Excerpt 5:

Frederick: What does.what does.er (1.0) what does Mandy's. er (1.0) aunt.what does Mandy's aunt? (4.0) She's a…?

Margaret: She's a v…(2.0)

Frederick: Vet.

Margaret: Vet.

In excerpt 6 he helps Margaret with the structure she seems to have trouble remembering.

Excerpt 6:

Margaret: Er.What does (2.0)

Frederick: What does Mandy's…

Margaret: Er.Mandy's (2.0) uncle do?

What these findings seem to indicate is that firstly, individual differences result in high variation regarding the number and type of strategies used, secondly, a higher frequency of NoM strategies does appear to be related to lower proficiency and, thirdly, that the significant variation in the type of NoM strategies used stems either from weaker than average students' requests for help, or from above average students offering assistance even when it is not specifically requested.

III.1.4.1. Negotiation of meaning strategies and communication difficulties

The greater part of the NoM strategies identified in this study resulted from communication difficulties, apart from other-repetition situations, which one might argue do not necessarily stem from meaning-related issues but either from the learner's need for additional time to remember or organize language before production, or to display the speaker's reaction to the interlocutor's previous utterance. Naturally, clarification requests, confirmation checks and comprehension checks are, by definition, strategies used to address communication difficulties. Prompting situations, however, are not necessarily NoM strategies. They may occur in the absence of communication difficulties if a speaker wishes to encourage or suggest an idea to his interlocutor. However, all 21 prompting examples identified in this study resulted from speech difficulties, signalled either by speech pauses or by incorrect/incomprehensible language production, as in excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7:

Thomas: Er (1.0) What does Doug have to do?

Charlotte: Er (1.0) He has to do (2.0)

Thomas: Homework?

Charlotte: Do homework. Er.He has to.

Use of NoM strategies unrelated to communication difficulties was scarce and consisted mostly of self and other correction situations when meaning was understood despite problems with sentence structure and/or pronunciation. Apart from these, only one situation was identified of a student praising his partner after correction, hinting at children's tendency to focus on constructing their own meaning rather than their interlocutor's.

III.1.4.2. Negotiation of meaning strategies and production of output

Data shows that very few of the NoM strategies identified in this study resulted in modified output. In fact, most of the output produced took the form of self-repetition in response to clarification requests, as in excerpts 8 and 9, taken from tasks 1 and 3 respectively.

Excerpt 8:

Thomas: *Feed the cat.*

Charlotte: *Cat?*

Thomas: *The cat.*

Excerpt 9:

Sherlock Holmes: *Take the bus.*

Emma: *What?*

Sherlock Holmes: *Take the bus.*

On the one hand, self-repetition, although at a slower pace and with more careful pronunciation, was used nine times to ensure the interlocutor's understanding of an utterance (signalled by pauses in speech and followed by a signal that meaning had been understood, such as *Ah, OK* or moving on with the task), to address all six clarification requests, and 10 of 20 confirmation checks. Other-repetition, on the other hand, was the outcome of 12 of the 21 prompting situations. Although the output in these situations was

not in fact modified but merely repeated, the fact remains that these students were not able to produce the language without the help of their partners. Likewise, clarification requests consisted of utterances such as *What?* Or *Hum?* and, of the10 remaining confirmation checks, nine were addressed by using expressions such as *yes* or *hum hum* (L1 was used once).

All in all, the fact that 67 out of 69 episodes of meaning-related difficulties were successfully resolved suggests that the participants in this study negotiated for meaning to prevent communication breakdowns but not by producing modified output as, given their limited linguistic skills and to avoid using L1, the output produced was limited to repetition, universally understood interjections (*humm humm*) and short words in L2 (*Yes, No*). Additionally, according to the teacher's notes, students did evidence progress regarding their interactional skills, as they needed less time to complete the tasks and, over time, their speech evidenced less frequent pauses and hesitations, their pronunciation improved significantly, and they showed an increasing awareness of the L2's syntactic patterns. What this seems to suggest is that the benefits of peer interaction do not necessarily stem from the production of modified output, as children appear to go through the stages of noticing and comparison mentioned by Ellis (1991) but their age and limited skills seem to prevent them from reaching integration. The benefits resulting from peer interaction may therefore stem from the need to pay attention to form and the development of other cognitive and social skills as stated by Garcia-Maío & Ibarrola (2015), the exposure to formulaic language (which may originate not only from the task itself but also from task-management, set up and feedback), and the increase of children's motivation and confidence to use L2.

III.1.5. Individual differences and self-assessment

As mentioned in the methodology section, different levels of language knowledge were one of the criteria behind the choice of pairs (all pairs recorded included one weaker and one stronger student). The relevance of this criteria became clearer after an analysis of the distribution of the type of strategies per student revealed significant discrepancies between the use of strategies by students in the same pairs, as shown in figures 8 and 9, where the stronger students in each pair were identified as student .1 and the weaker ones as student .2. Behind these discrepancies seemed to be the fact that the weaker learners tended to produce strategies to request assistance, such as clarification requests, confirmation checks and other-repetitions, while the stronger ones tended to produce

mostly strategies to provide assistance, like self-repetitions and promptings, as well as error-correction strategies. Apart from pair B, no significant differences were found regarding the use of L1/L2 for task-management purposes.

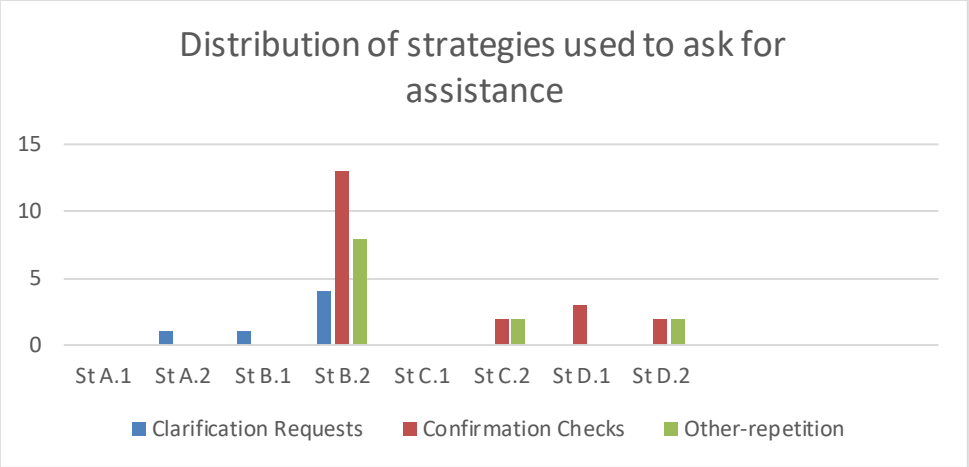

Fig. 8 – Distribution of strategies to ask for assistance

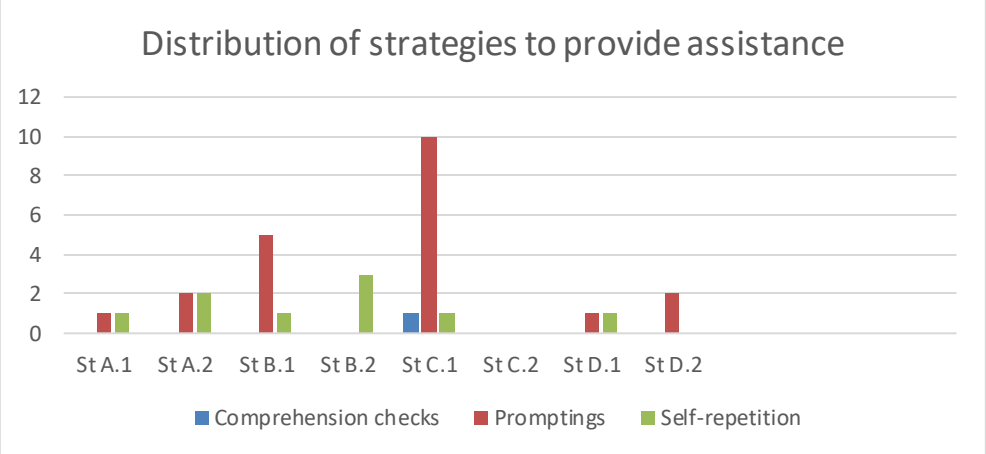

Fig. 9 – Distribution of strategies to provide assistance

What this seems to suggest is that while weaker (not necessarily weak) learners benefit from interacting with stronger peers, stronger students also strengthen their skills, not only by paying attention to form, but also by increasing their language exposure and practice, as well as their confidence and motivation to use the target language. Additionally, the students' self-assessment charts showed acknowledgement of an increase in their ability to understand and make themselves understood by their colleagues, with four students going from *I need help!* to *Good!*, two from *I need help!* to *Great!* and 11 from *Good!* To *Great!* between tasks 1 and 3 (table 3), and five students

explicitly expressing their preference for peer interaction in *3 things I enjoyed* in task 1, 12 in task 2 and 14 in task 3, showing an increase in motivation over time.

Table 3 – Students response to question 1 of the self-assessment charts throughout tasks

	Task 1	**Task 2**	**Task 3**
I need help!	6	4	0
Good!	14	16	18
Great!	5	5	7

Moreover, the teacher's notes mention that in the post-task stage a significant number of students evidenced awareness and openly expressed their satisfaction regarding the mutual assistance element involved in these tasks. Therefore, peer interaction appears to be effective in fostering not only language acquisition, but also in promoting learners' social and collaborative skills.

III.2. Discussion and conclusion

III.2.1. Summary of research questions and findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the type and frequency of conversational strategies used by 9- and10-year-old 4th grade EFL students while performing task-based activities in pairs, as well as how these conversational strategies influence the learners' ability to communicate. To answer these questions, three tasks focusing on vocabulary and grammar structures from three consecutive course book/syllabus units were implemented over a period of nine weeks. Four pairs of students were recorded while completing the tasks, and their spoken production was subsequently transcribed and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively (strategies were counted and coded, and their distribution per task, pair and student examined).

Data analysis showed that conversational strategies seem to play an important role in peer interaction, as they were used in approximately 50% of the children's production. Despite significant variation between tasks and pairs, L1 for task management purposes was by far the most frequently used strategy. This seems to reflect this age group's limited L2 skills, with students resorting to L1 to address procedural-related issues and to codeswitch when their knowledge of English was insufficient to convey their message. However, there seemed to be a broad tendency for using less L1 over time, as half the

participants showed a substantial reduction in its use between tasks 1 and 3. This appears to stem mostly from task familiarity, with students showing less of a need to address task-management issues over time. Additionally, L2 was almost exclusively limited to the target language taught at the time, with very few examples of its use for task management purposes, and these were either produced by exceptionally strong students or very limited in range (*Yes./No./You./I don't know.*). However, factors such as the relationship between students or their attitude towards the task may also influence the children's use of L1. Nevertheless, and although two months is a notably short period of time for language acquisition to take place, there seems to be progress regarding L2 fluency as well, with students producing more accurate, confident, faster paced speech, likely reflecting a growing awareness of the L2 sounds and patterns, which seems to indicate progress regarding phonology and syntax.

As with the use of L2 for task management purposes, error-correction strategies, whether self or other, were rare throughout this study, again suggesting this age groups' limited ability to use them. In fact, their frequency was low and they were mostly produced by stronger students. This is likely related to children's tendency to prioritize meaning over form (Cameron, 2001), as in most instances of inaccurate spoken production, interlocutors were still able to understand and convey meaning and moved the conversation along without signalling errors. Moreover, none of the error-correction strategies identified resulted from communication difficulties, hinting that while they might be useful to improve the learners' accuracy, they do not play a significant role in terms of communicational success.

In line with Foster's (1998) findings, NoM strategies were relatively infrequent throughout this study, and significant variation was found in terms of type and distribution per pair, appearing to stem from individual differences, with very limited modified output. As in Oliver, (2002) variation regarding distribution per pair appeared to be related to the learners' language skills as one pair including a particularly weaker student used nearly twice as many of these strategies as the remaining three pairs. Moreover, the fact that this pair reduced its use of NoM strategies by half between tasks may reflect the student's progress and consequently fewer meaning-related difficulties. Variation in type, on the other hand, appears to be linked not only to language skills but also to the function of NoM strategies, that is whether students used them to request or to provide assistance, with the less skilled students in each pair producing 34 out of 36 of the former, and the more skilled ones producing 22 out of 32 of the latter. Regarding strategies used to request

help, confirmation checks are the most frequently used, with only six clarification requests and 12 examples of other-repetition identified. Conversely, prompts were the most recurrent of the assistance providing strategies used. Only one comprehension check was found, supporting Oliver's (1998) view on how children's low proficiency and egocentric nature limit their ability to focus on their interlocutor's needs, although one might argue that the 12 situations of self-repetition perform a similar function, with students acknowledging their partners' difficulties and actively working to overcome them. What can be concluded from this is that, when negotiating for meaning, the weaker learners often asked their partners for help, while the stronger ones provided their colleagues with assistance when difficulties were perceived, even if it was not openly requested. Furthermore, even if the participants scarce language knowledge often limited their output to repetition, interjections and a few short expressions in L2, nearly all the NoM strategies identified in this study were effective in helping students overcome whatever difficulties originated them. As in Foster & Ohta (2005) and Oliver, Philp & Duchesne (2017), these tendencies seem to indicate their ability to use other strategies to work collaboratively towards successful communication, simultaneously increasing their motivation and confidence in their ability to speak L2, and significantly reducing the amount of time necessary to complete the tasks. This is also suggested by the teacher's notes and the students' self-assessment charts.

III.2.2. Relevance of peer interaction in the classroom context

Given the results presented in the previous section, it becomes difficult to argue against the frequent inclusion of spoken peer interaction in our lessons. Firstly, research indicates that interaction is fundamental for language acquisition to take place Consequently if, on the one hand, teacher-student interaction cannot happen frequently due to the teacher-student ratio in our classrooms and, on the other, the benefits stemming from teacher-student interaction are not the same as those resulting from peer interaction, the need for the latter in our classrooms becomes apparent. Secondly, although communication difficulties were indeed frequent, by resorting to conversational strategies children were able to work collaboratively to overcome these obstacles, thus developing not only linguistic but also other cognitive and social skills. Thirdly, it provided for productive, engaging and meaningful student-centred practice of the target language. Finally, it seemed to play an important role in fostering the children's self-confidence and willingness to use L2. Moreover, young learners' teachers can take additional measures

to extend these benefits even further. For example, task-based activities appear to be particularly effective to promote peer interaction, as tasks can add to the communicative purpose of the activity by offering a clear, preferably ludic goal to introduce an element of fun which will likely increase the children's motivation. Additionally, setting up and modelling tasks can provide us with manifold opportunities to teach our students the formulaic language they need to interact with each other within the context of the task, thus reducing the need for L1. We can also work to improve the students' ability to use NoM as well as error-correction strategies, namely by modelling them through teacher-student interaction, or even by explicitly teaching and encouraging students to use them, as this has been successfully achieved with adults (Naughton, 2006).

On the other hand, a rehearsal task implemented to anticipate potential problems before the beginning of the study showed that there are a few things to consider before peer interaction activities can be successfully implemented. Firstly, teachers should guarantee that the children are sufficiently familiar with the target language, for instance by previously resorting to frequent pair-work accuracy-based activities such as brief ordering or true or false games. Secondly, if tasks are not carefully planned or adapted to fit the learners' linguistic and cognitive skills, they naturally will not be able to complete them. Thirdly, as adequate as a task may be, without ensuring that instructions are clearly understood by all our students, we may find ourselves in a noisy and chaotic classroom. Lastly, choice of pairs (or groups) should, whenever possible, be determined by a cordial relationship between partners, while different levels of language proficiency, with children working to understand their colleagues or to make themselves understood, seem to be more effective in promoting language acquisition. Not meeting these conditions may render the task too challenging and lead teachers to deem these activities inadequate for young learners.

III.2.3. Benefits of AR and suggestions for further research

As teachers, we know our students learn things by doing them, by reflecting on what they are doing, how they are doing it, and what they can do to enhance this process. My first experience with AR taught me to apply these principles to myself to improve my teaching practice. It allowed me the freedom to choose a topic I believe is crucial for language acquisition and the opportunity to research the reality of my own classroom, leading me to closely examining and developing a much stronger understanding of what takes place when students are engaged in peer interaction, and on which benefits I might

expect my students to draw from it. More specifically, this study taught me that children do use a range of conversational strategies to communicate with their peers, and that these strategies do enhance their language acquisition process, namely by increasing fluency, by increasing their motivation to communicate in L2 and by developing other non-linguistic skills such as their ability to work collaboratively.

Additionally, this study has further increased my interest in the topic of peer interaction, as several questions have arisen from its results. Some of these questions stem from its two months length, a notably short period of time for any major changes regarding language skills to take place. It would therefore be interesting to analyse the effects of task-based activities on the learners' use of strategies over the period of an entire school year, for example, particularly concerning the students need to use L1 and their ability to use L2 (if properly taught/modelled), whether formulaically or in a more comprehensive manner, for task management purposes. The children's capacity to extend L2 use to produce more complex modified output might also benefit from a longer research interval.

Furthermore, and although keeping in mind that language development is naturally limited by the participants' age and skills, a study of progress regarding pronunciation, speech pace and structure awareness might be useful to provide insight into these aspects of language production. Equally interesting would be a comparison between the type, frequency and usefulness of strategies used in task-based activities and those used in other communicative activities such as role-plays.

Finally, I would suggest research regarding the composition of pairs, specifically by pairing up students with similarly high, average or low language skills, to ascertain how this type of variation may influence young learners' use of conversational strategies, and to what extent these strategies may affect their ability to communicate successfully.

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Appendix A – Letter of consent to school board

A/C Conselho Diretivo / Conselho Pedagógico

O meu nome é Ana Débora Botica de Oliveira e irei, ao longo do 1º período deste ano letivo, realizar a Prática de Ensino Supervisionada (PES) II no âmbito do Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa na vossa instituição, com a colaboração da Professora Mónica Colaço.

A conclusão do Mestrado acima mencionado pressupõe a realização de um projeto de investigação a desenvolver ao longo da PES. O meu projeto intitula-se *Effects of task-based activities on young learners' conversational strategies* (Efeitos das atividades baseadas em tarefas nas estratégias conversacionais das crianças), e envolve a realização de tarefas realizadas na sala de aula, ao longo do período, tendo como objetivo determinar a sua influência nas competências de interação oral dos alunos.

Assim, venho solicitar a vossa autorização para desenvolver este projeto com a turma X, de setembro a dezembro de 2018. Solicitarei igualmente autorização aos pais e encarregados de educação, bem como às próprias crianças. A participação no mesmo é naturalmente voluntária e a qualquer altura os alunos poderão decidir não participar nas atividades. A recolha da informação será feita a partir de gravações áudio de atividades de comunicação/interação e das minhas observações ao longo da realização destas atividades. As informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências. A instituição, os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimas e não serão obtidas imagens de qualquer tipo, nem da instituição nem das crianças.

Não hesitem em contactar-me para o esclarecimento de qualquer questão, através do email anadebora.botica@gmail.com ou do telemóvel 960001209.

Agradeço desde já a atenção dispensada, bem como todo o apoio prestado até à data e fico a aguardar a vossa autorização.

Lisboa, 28 de setembro de 2018
Ana Débora Botica de Oliveira

Prof.ª Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Orientadora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

_____ _____

✂----------

Eu,
_____

Diretor(a) do (), declaro que fui informado(a) dos objetivos do projeto intitulado *Effects of task-based activities on young learners' conversational strategies* (Efeitos das atividades baseadas em tarefas nas estratégias conversacionais das crianças) e autorizo os alunos da turma X do () a participar no estudo.

Data: _____

Assinatura:
_____

Appendix B – Letter of consent to parents

Caros pais / encarregados de educação,

O meu nome é Ana Débora Botica de Oliveira e irei, ao longo do 1º período deste ano letivo, realizar a Prática de Ensino Supervisionada (PES) II no âmbito do Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico da Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa junto dos vossos educandos, com a colaboração da Professora Mónica Colaço.

A conclusão do Mestrado acima mencionado pressupõe a realização de um projeto de investigação a desenvolver ao longo da PES. O meu projeto intitula-se *Effects of task-based activities on young learners' conversational strategies* (Efeitos das atividades baseadas em tarefas nas estratégias conversacionais das crianças), e envolve a realização de tarefas realizadas na sala de aula, ao longo do período, tendo como objetivo determinar a sua influência nas competências de interação oral dos alunos.

Assim, venho solicitar a vossa autorização para a participação dos vossos educandos neste projeto, que decorrerá entre setembro e dezembro deste ano letivo. Solicitarei igualmente autorização à direção da escola, bem como às próprias crianças. A participação no mesmo é naturalmente voluntária e a qualquer altura os alunos poderão decidir não participar nas atividades. A recolha da informação será feita a partir de gravações áudio de atividades de comunicação/interação e das minhas observações ao longo da realização destas atividades. As informações obtidas serão referidas no meu relatório final de mestrado e eventualmente em artigos académicos e conferências.

A instituição, os seus funcionários e as crianças permanecerão anónimos e não serão obtidas imagens de qualquer tipo, nem da instituição nem das crianças.

Não hesitem em contactar-me para o esclarecimento de qualquer questão, através da Coordenadora da Escola.

Agradeço desde já a atenção dispensada, bem como todo o apoio prestado até à data e fico a aguardar a vossa autorização (a primeira etapa deste projeto deverá ter lugar na segunda semana de outubro, pelo que agradeço a vossa resposta até dia 10/10/2018).

Lisboa, 28 de setembro de 2018
Ana Débora Botica de Oliveira

Prof.ª Doutora Carolyn Leslie
Orientadora de Estágio
FCSH, Universidade Nova Lisboa

_____ _____

✂----------

Eu,

_____

Encarregado de Educação de

_____

declaro que fui informado(a) dos objectivos do projeto intitulado *Effects of task-based activities on young learners' conversational strategies* (Efeitos das atividades baseadas em tarefas nas estratégias conversacionais das crianças), e autorizo o meu educando a participar no estudo.
Data: _____

Assinatura:_____

Appendix C – Letter of consent to children

Já me conheces, sou a *teacher* Débora e, como sabes, estou quase, quase a acabar o curso de professora de Inglês mas, para o acabar, preciso da tua ajuda. Para quê?

Este período, tenho de desenvolver um projeto de investigação  **com a tua turma. E o que é que eu vou investigar? É simples, vou tentar perceber como é que algumas atividades, daquelas em que tens de conversar com o teu colega do lado, e que já estás habituado a fazer nas aulas, te ajudam a falar melhor Inglês. Para quê? Para descobrir mais e melhores maneiras de te ajudar, a ti e aos teus colegas, a tornarem-se fantásticos *English speakers*!!!**

Mas, para isso, vou precisar de gravar as vossas conversas três ou quatro vezes (só a voz, sem imagens, por isso não vale a pena ires ao cabeleireiro ☺).

Claro que já escrevi aos teus pais a pedir que te deixem participar neste projeto, mas gostaria de te "ouvir" também a ti, porque afinal de contas quem vai participar és tu, não é?

É importante que saibas que não é obrigatório. Só participas se quiseres, se decidires não participar ou quiseres desistir a meio, não há problema nenhum. Se tiveres alguma pergunta, dúvida, problema, etc., podes vir ter comigo a qualquer altura. Se preferires, também podes falar com os teus pais.

E então, posso contar com a tua ajuda?

_____

Ana Débora de Oliveira

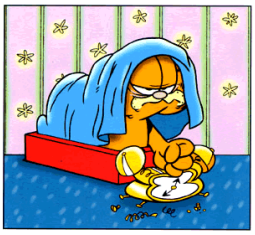
✂----------

Pinta a resposta correta:

☺…quero participar no projeto da *teacher* Débora
☹… não quero participar no projeto da *teacher* Débora

Appendix D – Task 1

A – WHAT DOES GARFIELD DO AT…?



7:10

7:30

7:45

2:45

4:30

8:00

B – WHAT DOES GARFIELD DO AT…?

7:10

7:30

7:45

2:45

4:30

8:00

Appendix E – Task 2

A **Hi! I'm Mandy and this is my family.**

What does Mandy's _____ do?

This is my mother.
She's a teacher.

This is my father.
He's a dentist.

This is my brother.
He's an architect.

This is my uncle.
He's a journalist.

This is my aunt.
She's a vet.

This is my sister.
She's a doctor.

B **Hi! I'm Mandy and this is my family.**

What does Mandy's _____do?

This is my mother.
She's a secretary.

This is my father.
He's a teacher.

This is my brother.
He's a salesperson.

This is my uncle.
He's a firefighter.

This is my aunt.
She's a waitress.

This is my sister.
She's a firefighter.

Appendix F – Task 3

CARD A

WHAT DOES _____ HAVE TO DO?

HE/SHE HAS TO …

FRANK

GRACE

BEN

EVE

DOUG

MARY

CARD B

WHAT DOES _____ HAVE TO DO?

HE/SHE HAS TO …

FRANK

GRACE

BEN

EVE

DOUG

MARY

Appendix G – Task 1 writing card

My name is _____ My partner's name is: _____

Date _____ 

Differences
1 - In card A Garfield gets up at 7:10 but in card B he has his breakfast at 7:10.
2 - In card A Garfield_____ at 7:30 but in card B he _____ at 7:30.
3 - In card A Garfield_____ at 7:45 but in card B he _____ at 7:45.
4 - In card A Garfield_____ at 2:45 but in card B he _____ at 2:45.
5 - In card A Garfield_____ at 4:30 but in card B he _____ at 4:30.
6 - In card A Garfield_____ at 8:00 but in card B he _____ at 8:00.

Appendix H – Task 2 writing card

My name is _____ My partner's name is: _____

Date _____

In card A: 

Mandy's mother is a teacher.

Mandy's father is a __ _____.

Mandy's brother is a __ _____.

Mandys uncle is a __ _____.

Mandy's aunt is a __ _____.

Mandy's sister is a __ _____.

In card B: 

Mandy's mother is a secretary.

Mandy's father is __ _____.

Mandy's brother is __ _____.

Mandy's uncle is __ _____.

Mandy's aunt is __ _____.

Mandy's sister is __ _____.

Appendix I – Task 3 writing card

My name is _____ My partner's name is: _____

Date _____

In card A:	**In card B:**
 **Frank has to <u>feed the cat</u>.**	**He has to <u>do his homework</u>.**
 **Grace has to _____.**	**She has to _____.**
 **Ben has to _____.**	**He has to _____.**
 **Eve has to _____.**	**She has to _____.**
 **Doug has to _____.**	**He has to _____.**
 **Mary has to _____.**	**She has to _____.**

Appendix J – Unit 1 self-assessment chart

Unit 1

Name: _____ Date: __/__/____

Colour the right face (pinta a cara correta):

I can (Consigo):	I need help!	Good!	Great!
Ask and tell the time (perguntar e dizer as horas):			
Read and spell the different daily routines (ler e escrever as diferentes rotinas diárias):			
Understand my colleagues describing their routines (compreender os meus colegas quando descrevem as suas rotinas):			
Talk about my daily routines (descrever oralmente as minhas rotinas):			

3 things I enjoyed (3 coisas de que gostei):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions (sugestões):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

For this unit, I give myself a:

 **OK!**  **Good!**  **Great!!!**

Appendix K – Unit 2 self-assessment chart

Unit 2

Name: _____ Date: __/__/____

Colour the right face (pinta a cara correta):

I can (Consigo):	I need help!	Good!	Great!
Ask and tell people about their jobs (perguntar e dizer quais as profissões):			
Read and spell the different jobs (Ler e escrever as diferentes profissões):			
Understand my colleagues describing jobs (compreender os meus colegas quando descrevem as diferentes profissões):			
Talk about what different jobs do (descrever oralmente as diferentes profissões):			

3 things I enjoyed (3 coisas de que gostei):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions (sugestões):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

For this unit, I give myself a:

 **OK!**  **Good!**  **Great!!!**

Appendix L – Unit 3 self-assessment chart

Unit 3

Name: _____ Date: __/__/____

Colour the right face (pinta a cara correta):

I can (Consigo):	I need help!	Good!	Great!
Ask and tell people about their chores/activities (Fazer perguntas e dar respostas sobre diversas tarefas/atividades):			
Understand my colleagues describing their chores/activities (Compreender os meus colegas quando descrevem as suas tarefas/atividades):			
Read and spell the different chores/activities (Ler e escrever corretamente as diferentes tarefas/atividades):			

3 things I enjoyed (3 coisas de que gostei):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Suggestions (sugestões):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

For this unit, I give myself a:

 **OK!**  **Good!**  **Great!!!**

Appendix M – Conversational strategies grids

1 – Overall distribution of conversational strategies per task

	L1	L2	ClrReq	ConfChck	CompChck	SR	OR	Prompting	SC	OC	Total (NoM)
Task 1 (198 turns)	58	13	3	9	0	5	2	7	4	2	103 (26)
Task 2 (244 turns)	90	4	2	6	1	3	4	6	4	4	124 (22)
Task 3 (154 turns)	41	13	1	5	0	1	6	8	5	5	85 (21)
Total	189	30	6	20	1	9	12	21	13	11	312 (69)

2 – Distribution of conversational strategies per task – Pair A

Pair A	L1	L2	ClRq	ConfCh	CompCh	SR	OR	Prompting	SC	OC	Total (NoM)
Task 1 (31 turns)	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	12 (2)
Task 2 (33 turns)	10	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	17 (4)
Task 3 (28 turns)	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	5 (1)
Total (92 turns)	23	2	1	0	0	3	0	3	2	0	34 (7)

3 – Distribution of conversational strategies per task – Pair B

Pair B	L1	L2	ClRq	ConfCh	Comp Ch	SR	OR	Prompting	SC	OC	Total (NoM)
Task 1 (79 CT)	23	13	3	5	0	3	1	3	1	0	52 (15)
Task 2 (98 CT)	61	0	1	4	0	1	3	2	0	0	72 (11)
Task 3 (56 CT)	23	5	1	4	0	0	4	0	0	2	39 (9)
Total CT (233)	107	18	5	13	0	4	8	5	1	2	163 (35)

4 – Distribution of conversational strategies per task – Pair C

Pair C	L1	L2	ClRq	ConfCh	Comp Ch	SR	OR	Prompting	SC	OC	Total (NoM)
Task 1 (30 CT)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	14 (2)
Task 2 (59 CT)	3	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	4	16 (6)
Task 3 (32 CT)	5	4	0	1	0	0	1	6	2	3	22 (8)
Total CT (121)	18	6	0	2	1	1	2	10	5	7	52 (16)

5 – Distribution of conversational strategies per task – Pair D

Pair D	L1	L2	ClRq	ConfCh	Comp Ch	SR	OR	Prompting	SC	OC	Total (NoM)
Task 1 (58 CT)	15	0	0	4	0	1	1	1	1	2	25 (7)
Task 2 (54 CT)	16	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	19 (1)
Task 3 (38 CT)	10	4	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	19 (3)
Total CT (150)	41	4	0	5	0	1	2	3	5	2	63 (11)

6 – Distribution of conversational strategies per student

	L1	L2	ClR	CfC	CmpC	SR	OR	Prompting	SC	OC
A.1	8	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0
A.2	15	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
B.1	50	8	1	0	0	1	0	5	1	2
B.2	57	10	4	13	0	3	8	0	0	0
C.1	13	6	0	0	1	1	0	10	3	7
C.2	5	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
D.1	20	2	0	3	0	1	0	1	2	0
D.2	21	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	3	2